

Chesham Urban District Council.



REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH For the Year 1918.



THOMAS F. LONG,
Medical Officer of Health.

To the Chairman and Members of the Chesham Urban District Council.

GENTLEMEN,

I have the honour of submitting for your consideration my 22nd Annual Report on the health of the inhabitants and the sanitary condition of your town. The period covered being the year 1918.

Physical Features and General Character of District.

These do not alter very much, with the exception that one finds a few new factories springing up within our area.

I am still of opinion that the tops of our surrounding hills would develop if only we could find the individual with sufficient capital and enterprise to put the houses up. This was very markedly brought home to us during the period when so many people from the London area came into this district. I know from the remarks made, that had the houses for them been erected that a very large percentage would have remained within our area, and it was only the absence of them that made them reluctantly look elsewhere.

When one takes into consideration that on the hills surrounding us there is good and efficient water supply, a sewage system, electric light, gas, to say nothing of the high altitude and splendid air and scenery, one wonders at the delay.

Social Conditions of the Inhabitants.

The last time that I wrote at all fully on this question I felt myself compelled to draw your attention to the exceedingly low wages paid to the industrial workers within your area. That time is now past, and the inhabitants, if not over paid when compared with other districts—if all that one reads and hears is true—still have a wage in which one can see the possibility of them living and not merely existing as was the case then. One has to admit that the cost of living has gone up very considerably, but at the same time I do not think that it has gone up in the same fashion as the wages.

Forms of Gratuitous Medical Relief in the District.

(A) THE COTTAGE HOSPITAL.—This Institute has been doing splendid work for years past, but I have no hesitation in saying that during the year that we have under consideration it surpassed itself both in numbers and efficiency. The Hospital year ended on June 30th, and from July 1st, 1917, to January 30th 1918, the number of patients received into the institution was 137, which beats all previous records by a considerable number. In this successful year we are mainly indebted to Sister LeGrys for

the way in which the institution has been run.

The only fault that I have to find with it is that if it were twice the size there would then be a possibility of its coming up to the requirements of the district.

I do not think that I can too strongly recommend this matter to the notice of the inhabitants of the town and district.

During the last five years there has been a greater tendency to take children into hospital, and this certainly is as it should be, but we are for this very reason urgently in need of a children's ward.

(B) THE DISTRICT NURSE.—Owing to the diversity of accidents the work done by this Society has been somewhat scrappy, but I have no doubt but that the committee quite recognise their responsibility, and now that things are settling down this Association will soon be doing its usual useful work.

I am afraid that, like the Hospital, this fund is still suffering for lack of the necessary donations to carry out the work.

Personally I am very strongly of opinion that it is quite time that these matters received their remuneration from either tax or ratepayers, so that everybody is compelled to pay their proper contribution toward the upkeep. While the voluntary contribution system exists you will always come across many who can well afford it who will give nothing at all, or perhaps the smallest coin, to the lady collector.

(C) INFANT WELFARE CENTRE.—This is, I think, doing good work, the number of mothers bringing their children increasing each month. I am pleased to report that during the year the County Council have arranged for Nurse Rothwill to take on the duties of visiting in cases where the children do not attend at the Centre. The number of children now on the books is 53.

(D) DENTAL CLINIC.—During the year between four and five hundred children attended for treatment. I am confident that this is going to be a source of great benefit to the rising generation.

(E) TUBERCULOSIS DISPENSARY.—This institution under Dr. Burra, the County Tuberculosis Officer, is open on the first and third Tuesday in each month. I should like to draw the attention of the inhabitants of Chesham to this fact: That the dispensary is not alone for the treatment of tubercle, but is also a centre where the general practitioners of the district may send any case in which he may be suspicious of the disease, possibly from the patient having lived in the same house as tuberculosis patient or the family history showing an inheritary predisposition to the disease, for the decision of a medical man who has specialised in this particular ailment.

Water Supply.

As you are well aware, practically the whole town has a constant supply of water from the Council's own main. The water itself is of good quality, although somewhat hard. I have no reason to fear or even suspect any form of contamination. In the period before the war it was our usual custom to send a sample at least once a year to the Clinical Research Association for examination. This has not been done now for some few years, but I would suggest that now that times are a little more normal that we should resort to our pre-war custom.

Rivers and Streams.

I have received no information as to the pollution of rivers and streams in your district, but shall have a few remarks to make on this question when dealing with the drainage and Sewage.

Drainage and Sewage.

The last time that I reported on this matter I drew your attention to the fact that a considerable portion of the town had been re-sewered with iron pipes. On this occasion I made the remark that I was afraid even then than our troubles were not at an end.

This has, I am sorry to say, proved only too true. As to whether the fault is due to the condition of the house drains in the water-logged area—which seems more than probable—or to the conditions of the sewers that have not been relaid in iron, it is difficult to say. But the fact is very evident that it only requires the springs to rise high enough and we have the same condition of flooded sewers and roads as we had before the new sewers were put down. I am well aware that the matter of expense is a great one and makes one think, but at the same time one cannot shut one's eyes to the fact that the public health point of view is far more serious than even the financial.

I am aware that the sewage that finds its way into the water courses must, under the circumstances, be in a very diluted condition, but at the same time one has to admit that this water has been in our sewers, and the result of this is obvious.

I do not think that I can too strongly recommend this matter to your immediate notice, as I feel very strongly that something must be done in the matter.

The difficulty I know is that the matter can only be attended to when the springs are low and that it takes time to prepare for these matters, so that there is little likelihood of you being able to deal with the matter this year, but I sincerely hope, from a public health standpoint, that necessary arrangements will be made for dealing with the matter in 1920.

Water Closet Accommodation.

This is, I believe, in a fairly satisfactory condition. The six cesspools and earth closets still exist, but I do not consider that they will do any harm, and your Inspector informs me that owing to their situation it would be practically impossible to sewer them.

Among the old property there still exists some houses with only one w.c. for two houses. At present one is quite unable to deal with this matter. Possibly, when the house accommodation is improved so that there are houses of a better stamp for these people to go into, this matter will right itself. At any rate the whole matter must stand over for the present, as I have already said it exists in the old property and as to how many of them will be allowed to remain when the new houses are built remains to be seen.

Sewage Farm.

This is, I believe, doing its work efficiently and well. I have heard of no complaints of the effluent from the Thames Conservancy for some time.

Scavenging.

This is done in a far better manner than when I last reported on the matter.

It is now fetched from the back of the houses by the Council's employees, so that one is well rid of the nuisance of seeing any old receptacle containing three or four days' refuse in the gutters on both sides of the street curb, of which I had to complain them.

Sanitary Inspection of District.

During the year the total number of inspections made in your district has been 3,701, made up as follows:—

Dwelling houses	3,080
Factories and workshops	64
Cowsheds, dairies, etc. ...	33
Slaughter houses.....	425
Bakehouses	60
Lodging houses	11
Infectious disease (on account of)	28
Total.....	3,701
Letters written	162
Preliminary Notice served	29
Statutory Notice served...	0
Summonses	4
Convictions	2

Food Supply.

Your Inspector's report on this matter is before me as I write, and it appears to me the best thing for me to do will be to enclose it with this: you will then see the amount of work he has accomplished.

Personally I am quite in agreement with his remarks, both on the milk adulteration question and also in the matter of a public slaughter house, a want that I have been advocating for years.

Factories and Workshops.

Number of Factories and Workshops on the register	108
Number of visits paid to same	64
Defects found:	
Choked drain.....	5
Defective water fitting in w.c.	6
Accumulation of refuse...	3
Dirty w.c.....	1
List of Out-workers received	6

Housing.

This is certainly the most pressing question in your area. I am confident that were you to build one hundred houses to-morrow that they would all be inhabited in a week or two—not by outsiders coming into the district, but by the town people themselves.

I have not the least doubt but that there are some who will think the figure an extravagant one and suggest that your Medical Officer of Health has overstepped the mark this time, as they are quite sure that there are not as many people as that waiting for houses. Possibly they are right; there may not be as many as that waiting for houses, but there are a good many cases of these. And what about those who are living in houses which at the present time are not fit for human habitation, and who only live in them because they have nowhere else to go, how many are there of these? Or those who will live anywhere because the house is cheap-rented: are they not to be provided for? The former because they ask it, and the latter because it is good for them. I feel sure with the present state of wages that there must be very few now in the town who could not, if they chose, pay five or six shillings a week rent. After all, their wages have, in most cases, been more than doubled, and the number of houses let at under 3/- a week, even in 1911, were pretty few, and we may be quite sure with the condition of supply and demand, being as it has been since that time, that these rents have all been raised. But the matter does not end here. I say most emphatically that there are a large number of houses in this area that are not fit for human habitation, and as soon as houses can be found for the present occupier I shall feel it my duty, as Medical Officer of Health, to bring this matter to your notice with a view to shifting the inhabitants into the new houses, not with the idea of allowing the present

landlords to relet these, which I can call nothing else but slum dwellings, to others, and so continuing the nuisance, but with the view of exercising the powers that you have of applying for closing orders and so doing away with them altogether. This may not be in the interests of property owners, but it is certainly in the interest of public health, to say nothing of the present occupier.

Methods of Dealing with Infectious Diseases.

No alteration has taken place in our method since last I wrote. The Isolation Hospital in The Vale has not been open during the year.

Notifications.

During the year I have received 42 notifications under the Infectious Diseases Notification Act. These are as follows :

Scarlet Fever	1
Erysipelas	3
Diphtheria	4
Pulmonary Tuberculosis ...	9
Tuberculosis other than	
Pulmonary	3
Measles	20
German Measles	2
	—
	42
	—

No cases of Acute Poliomyelitis, Cerebro Spinal Fever, Anthrax, Ophthalmia Neonatorum, Small Pox, Enteric or Puerperal Fever have been notified during the year.

Scarlet Fever.

This is the smallest number of cases that I have had to record of this disease occurring in any year during the 22 years I have acted as your Medical Officer of Health. The case was contracted outside your area and from the situation of the case I consider that we were exceedingly fortunate in having no further cases.

Erysipelas.

These cases are still notified as a matter of routine, but I still see no useful purpose to be served in doing so.

Diphtheria.

Four of these cases were brought to my notice late in the year. The first case, which was notified on November 21st, was a child in Townfield-yard, aged 4 months. I visited the house personally the same evening, and on your Sanitary Inspector calling the next morning the child had died during the night. Your Inspector at once took the necessary precaution as to disinfection.

On December 1st I received two notifications of the disease. In the first of the cases the child had been removed to the London Fever Hospital before I received the notification, by the parents' request. The second was a child living in the Lodging House in Church Street. The mother was one of those unfortunate people who had come into the district from London to escape aircraft. At my suggestion arrangements were made by the friends to have this case removed to the same institution, the parents at the time undertaking to pay all expenses. Before arrangements could be made for the removal, the fourth case was notified, and on my own initiation I at once gave permission for this case to be removed with the third case.

Enteric Fever.

It is now eight years since any case of this disease has been notified within your area.

Small-Pox.

There have been no cases of this disease notified in the Urban District of Chesham during the last 22 years.

Puerperal Fever.

The last notification I received of this disease was in the year 1904.

Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

I am pleased to report a steady falling off in the number of cases of this disease. When the order was made in 1912 I received 21 notifications of the disease followed by 24 in the following year, and 14 in 1914.

My number this year is 9, which one must consider satisfactory when one takes into consideration the conditions under which we have all been living during the last three years.

In mentioning these cases I think it only right to say that in my opinion two of these cases do not rightly belong to Chesham. My reason for saying so is that although the patients, in one instance at any rate, may have belonged to Chesham, in the second instance there seems a great doubt even about that; they were when notified, residents, and had been for some time in the County Asylum at Stone. The mere fact that the cases were not notified at the time of admission should point pretty conclusively to the fact that they had not the disease when they were admitted to the institution, and therefore contracted it there.

I am still looking forward to the time when some arrangement can be made for the reception into an institution of advanced cases of this disease, as I am confident that by this means a more decided attack would be made on the

disease. At the present time early cases are taken into a sanatorium for treatment, but if the case becomes past the curing stage the patient is sent home to die. This may be correct from the point of view that if the patient is past all chance of cure that room must be made in the institution for those cases that can be cured, but from a public health point of view I consider it absolutely wrong as you are sending the patient back into probably a thickly populated area with very little, if any, chances of isolation, at the very time when he is most likely to do harm to his fellow man.

While looking forward to some arrangements being made, I am still strongly against the suggested method of putting up a small pox hospital, and using it for cases of tuberculosis. I quite agree a building could be put up that would be quite useful for these patients, but if it is I am equally sure that it would be no use for small pox, as you would never have it cleared in time.

During the year 7 males and 4 females died of tuberculosis.

Influenza.

During the year 38 of the inhabitants of Chesham lost their life from this disease.

One has seen and heard a considerable amount of argument going on as to what the epidemic which visited us with such disastrous effect during the latter months of the year, really was. Personally I am very confident that the disease was just our old enemy, true influenza, and the reason for it proving so fatal was that owing to excessive work and poor feeding the nation as a whole was in such a run-down condition of health that it was unable to stand up against it.

Population.

This is quite impossible to estimate. I have certain figures sent to me by the Registrar-General which I am to use in estimating the birth and death rates of your district. This I shall do more or less blindly, and we must look forward to the next census returns to put us on our feet again in this particular.

Death Rate.

The number of deaths registered in your district is 137, which exceeds any previous figure that I have had to report. The following are the returns for each month :

January	11
February	9
March	6
April	5
May	10
June	12
July	5

August	8
September	5
October	8
November	29
December.....	13

These 137 deaths give us a death rate of 17.0, which, although far in excess of anything before reported, is about the same as the death rate in England and Wales for the corresponding time—17.6.

During the year 22 deaths of Chesham residents have been registered as occurring in public institutions beyond the district, while 5 non-residents having died in the Cottage Hospital have been registered in this district. This gives us a net death rate of 19.1.

Birth Rate.

The number of births registered during the year is 117, giving a birth rate of 12.6. This compares very badly with the figure of last year, when we showed a birth rate of 18.7 for 156 births. This is the first time that I have had to record the deaths in your area as being greater than the births. Even admitting that owing to existing circumstances the deaths have been very heavy, and owing to war conditions the younger men have been separated from their wives, I still consider this a very serious condition.

The birth rate has now been dropping for years, and although the existing conditions certainly must have something to do with it, I am confident that this is not the only reason.

Getting about as I do among all sorts and conditions, I have long since come to the conclusion that we as a nation are thinking far more of our own personal comforts than of what is best for the nation as a whole. The younger members of the fraternity are quite prepared to show their so-called patriotism by shouting and flag-wagging, but when it comes to having children to carry on that nation they don't want to, and what is more they candidly say that they do not intend to be bothered with them.

I am confident that the seriousness of this question has got to be faced, and in my opinion the sooner the better.

I am not at all sure that a proper maternity home in each district, where the expectant mother might pass through this most trying time under comfortable surroundings, would not do something to help the case. There is no doubt in my mind that a lot more could be done to help them in an institution of this kind than in their own homes.

Infant Mortality.

Of the 137 deaths registered, 7 have been those of infants under one year of age, giving an infant mortality of 59.8.

This is a decided improvement on all former years, and taking into account the amount of sickness that has existed throughout the year, must be considered very satisfactory. Of this number, judging from the certificates of death given, three at least were very poor specimens who had very little chance of living, while one other was a child of four months old who contracted diphtheria. As to whether the result is in any way due to the starting of the Infant Welfare Centre in this town time alone will prove.

I am convinced of one thing, and that is that it is partly due to the children having been taken into the Hospital when seriously ill. Many a life has been saved in this way. Look what it means to have a sick child in the house: how can the poor mother look after all the work of the house and nurse the child both day and night? This condition is impossible, and should at all cost be guarded against. To meet the case we must have a children's ward at the Cottage Hospital. With this, your Welfare Centre, and a nurse to go round and visit those mothers who do not, for some reason or other, care to bring their infants

to the centre, I feel sure that our infant mortality will still decrease. I do not say that all children can be saved, but I am confident that we can get it much lower even than at present.

I am glad once more to have the opportunity of placing on record my appreciation of the work done by your Sanitary Inspector, Mr. H. Stacey. There was a time when I much feared that he would be seeking another district where the emolument was more to be desired. My sympathies are now with those who did not take him when they had a chance, as I sincerely hope they have now lost their opportunity. His report, which is printed with this, requires no comment as it speaks for itself.

Thanking you for the support you have accorded to me during the twelve months,

I beg to remain,

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS F. LONG,

M.O.H., Chesham U.D.C.

Chesham Urban Sanitary Authority.



FOOD SUPPLY.



Details of General Work.

Meat.

Number of Slaughterhouses on Register	8
Number of visits.....	425
Number of home-killed carcasses examined—	
Beast	297
Sheep	748
Pigs	320
Calves	13
Giving a total of	1,378

No record has been kept of Colonial carcasses examined.

Food Voluntarily Surrendered.

English Beef, chiefly tubercular	1,744
Colonial Beef	792
English Mutton	360
English Pork	13
Offals, various	400
Giving a total of.....	3,309
Corned Beef.....	112
Butter	56
Cheese	12
Bacon	24

Fish.

About 11,000 herrings and 3 cwt. of small fresh herrings.

One beast and one sheep was seized and a Justices' order for their destruction was obtained.

A summons followed in each case, the owner of the beast being fined £10. The case against the owner of the sheep was dismissed.

Four samples of sausage meat were obtained for analytical purposes.

Milk.

8 samples of milk were obtained for analysis, 5 of these being deficient in milk fat, this deficiency ranging up to 56%

Two summonses were issued in connection with these samples and instructions were given by the Council to proceed in two other cases, but owing to these last two not being served within the 28 days the cases had to be dropped.

In the cases of the two prosecutions one defendant was fined £2, the other case was dismissed. In this case the analyst's certificate stated that the milk was deficient in milk fat to the extent of 56%, but as I could not prove the milk had been tampered with in any way the Justices said they were bound to follow the ruling as given in the celebrated case, of *Hunt v. Richardson and Grigg v. Smith*.

Apparently children and invalids are of secondary importance to calves, from a national standpoint, as the first of these decisions was given several years ago, and nothing has been done by the Government to amend the law as interpreted in that decision. The talk about a C3 nation must be all moonshine, cowkeepers and dairymen's interests must be put into the forefront, calves must not be neglected, but children and invalids must get on as best they can on impoverished milk.

After the above decisions, and that of *Banks v. Wooller*, one is inclined to think that obtaining samples of milk for analysis is time and money wasted.

One sample of butter was sent for analysis, and proved genuine.

Food inspection is one of the most important and interesting duties of an inspector. It requires more tact, judgment and firmness than any other branch of his manifold duties, but meat inspection will never be satisfactorily carried out until all private slaughter houses are abolished, a public slaughter house provided and it is made compulsory for all animals intended for human consumption to be killed therein, and the carcasses passed by a qualified inspector.

HENRY STACEY.

